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SUBJECT: BIOFUELS: US EXPERT URGES COLOMBIA TO LOOK TOWARD
SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS

REF: A. STATE 30223
[¶](#) B. BOGOTA 36

[¶](#) 1. (SBU) SUMMARY: With funding from the Bureau of Economic, Energy and Business Affairs (EEB), Embassy Bogota hosted the visit of Roundtable for Sustainable Biofuels Director Charlotte Opal September 3-5 to inform local biofuels producers and policymakers about the ongoing international dialogue on sustainability standards. As part of the two-day speaking program, Ms. Opal met with environmental activists, biofuels producers, government officials, and media as well as visited a biodiesel production facility under development.

Ms. Opal anchored her visit with a public presentation to approximately 175 industry, government, academic and media representatives at the National Economists' Forum. She underscored the potential to sustainably develop the Colombian biofuels sector, urging the public and private sectors to work closely on supplying input to rapidly evolving global discussions on standards. She also encouraged Colombia to include preparations for international biofuels certifications in its plans to eventually supply biofuels for export. Colombian interlocutors responded favorably, but emphasized the importance of avoiding a proliferation of different biofuel standards that could create a barrier to sector development. As a result of the visit, the GOC biofuels coordinator agreed to convene a domestic working group to contribute Colombian comments to the international discussions on biofuels standards. END SUMMARY.

Keynote Presentation

[¶](#) 2. (U) On September 3, Ms. Opal addressed approximately 175 biofuels producers, government officials, academics, and members of the local media at the National Economists' Forum regarding work of the Roundtable for Sustainable Biofuels and other institutions in developing sustainability standards for biofuels production. Ms. Opal outlined the current version of standards proposed by the Roundtable as well as the ongoing discussions in the Global Bioenergy Partnership (GBEP). She noted that individual markets such as the European Union were likely to establish firm sustainability standards for imported biofuels by 2010. Following the speech, audience members asked about the proliferation of standards mechanisms for various feedstock, the coordination between ongoing dialogues, and how standards might serve as a barrier to trade and development. Ms. Opal highlighted the collaboration between the Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels and other institutions such as the Roundtable for Sustainable

Palm Oil as part of the effort to avoid duplicative standards. She urged input from all stakeholders, including Colombian, in order to develop mutually agreed standards that fostered, rather than impeded, development of a global biofuels industry.

Environment, Producer, Media & GOC Meetings

13. (U) Ms. Opal attended roundtables with environmental, producer and GOC officials, respectively, to discuss the potential for sustainable development of biofuels in Colombia and the role of international standards. Representatives from the Nature Conservancy, the Humboldt Center, the World Wildlife Fund, Conservation International, and the Inter-American Development Bank outlined efforts to coordinate with palm and sugar producers on establishing environmental principles for biodiesel and ethanol production. They welcomed the establishment of broad international standards for sustainable biofuels, but acknowledged that Colombia needed to move faster to contribute to the dialogue. Ms. Opal encouraged the environmental community to seek out areas of cooperation with biofuels producers on land management and shared principles.

14. (U) In discussions with the Federation of Biofuels Producers, Ms. Opal stressed the value-added benefits of seeking international certifications of compliance with environmental, labor, and quality standards. She also encouraged producers to continue to pursue production practices that prevent deforestation, protect biodiversity and promote sound land management.

15. (SBU) In her meeting with National Biofuels Coordinator Arturo Infante and technical representatives of the Ministries of Energy, Agriculture and Planning, Ms. Opal urged the GOC to coordinate with the environmental community and private sector as it develops domestic biofuels standards. Dr. Infante noted efforts to incorporate stakeholder input into the National Biofuels Strategy announced in April 2008. He also announced that the GBEP had just accepted Colombia as a member country and said that he hoped the GBEP could serve as a governmental forum for standards discussions. Infante expressed some reservations about the "virtual" format of the Roundtable's stakeholder dialogue, suggesting that a schedule of formal meetings might be more effective, but agreed to activate a multi-stakeholder Colombian working group to provide input to the Roundtable's draft standards, as well as through the GBEP.

Media Roundtable

16. (U) In light of the high-profile of biofuels issues in Colombian media, Ms. Opal concluded her visit by briefing journalists from leading print media outlets *El Tiempo*, *Portafolio*, *Colprensa*, *La Republica*, *Dinero*, and *Responsabilidad Social*. The participating journalists told post following the roundtable that the briefing was valuable in underscoring the ongoing international discussion of sustainable biofuels and that they planned to include material from the discussion with Ms. Opal in future reporting on the sector.

Site Visit

17. (U) In addition to the public diplomacy program, Post organized a site visit for Ms. Opal to a palm oil-based biodiesel plant in Facatativa, outside of Bogota. Ms. Opal toured the new facility scheduled to initiate operations October 1 and received a briefing from the plant's general manager regarding the sustainable supply chain and low-environmental impact operational model.

Result/Impact

¶8. (SBU) Ms. Opal's presentations on the rapidly evolving global discussions on biofuels standards served to capture the attention of Colombian biofuels producers, environmental activists and government policymakers. While Colombia had begun looking at sustainable certification of biofuels, Ms. Opal's messages on promoting public-private dialogue and contributing now to international standards discussions before global principles are finalized resonated with audiences. Most importantly, National Biofuels Coordinator Infante's commitment to activate a Colombian working group to provide input to international standards discussions represents a tangible outcome of the visit and will help ensure that Colombia's experiences are incorporated into the global biofuels sustainability debate.

Brownfield